Sustainability

Marie Kennedy, of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, argues that true community-based planning is a transformative and empowering process, combining material development with the development of people. It should, she states, "leave a community not just with more immediate 'products', .. but also with and increased capacity to meet future needs" (Kennedy, 1996, p. 12). According to Kennedy, the measure of the success of such a transformative and empowering community planning process should be the following[1]:

- The control of development being increasingly vested in community members;
- Increasing numbers of people moving from being an object of planning to being a subject;
- Increasing numbers of confident, competent, cooperative, and purposeful community members;
- People involved in the planning process gaining the ability to replicate their achievements in other situations; and
- Movement toward the realization of the values of equity and inclusion.

I. Some definitions of sustainability

Many definitions of sustainability exist in the literature, however, there is little agreement on the conceptual and operational definitions of sustainability. Some definitions include:

- Maintenance, routinization, local or community ownership, capacity building
- The power and capacity of programs to continuously respond to identified community issues.
- Maintaining a focus consonant with the original goals and objectives of a program, including the individuals, families, and communities the program originally intended to serve.

II. Perspectives on sustainability

Four dimensions of sustainability[2]

1. Spirit: Whether there is a single founder or a group of founders, the impulse to undertake an activity and subsequently to start up an organization or project – its animating spirit - is key to sustainability. That initial energy and exuberance is inevitably tempered over time, but successful organizations find ways to renew that commitment and infuse new member with the same sense of purpose.
2. Values: The degree to which an organization is able to articulate, teach, and live its core values with integrity constitutes the foundation and structural framework on which organizational life is built. A coherent, cohesive organizational culture shaped by strongly held values is key to attracting and retaining staff and a prerequisite for sustaining high-quality services and products over time.
3. Niche: An organization must deeply understand and "fit" within its local ecosystem if it is to achieve sustainability. An organization must regularly revisit its mission, strategies, and programs to test its continuing efficacy with its intended constituents. It must be able to adapt to changing circumstances, seek out new partners, and ensure that the voices at the table are reflective of the community it serves.

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[1] Peterman

[2] *Reflections…*

4. Capacity: An organizations leaders must be able to articulate the vision for the agency's work, plan for effective implementation, and ensure appropriate day-to-day management of resources. Also important for sustainability is the identification and development of new leaders, both for the benefit of the organization and the larger community.

Some additional elements of sustainability[3]:
- Leadership competence
- Effective collaboration
- Demonstrating program results
- Strategic funding
- Adaptability to challenging conditions and change
- Broad base of community support
- Key champion
- Development of a sustainability plan

III. The issues and importance of incorporating sustainability early into the CCI planning process[4]

A challenge exists regarding incorporating sustainability early in the planning process of CCI's. Planning for sustainability of CCI's remains challenging for a number of reasons: before a program can be sustained, a program often needs to provide evidence of effectiveness, and providing such evidence in the case of CCI's is especially challenging; further, funding for CCI's is often focused on planning and implementation activities – rarely are funds explicitly provided for sustaining these activities.

Four reasons why a focus on sustainability is important early on in a project are:
- Programs that are sustained allow sufficient time for impacts to be observed in the community.
- Programs that are sustained over a long period of time allow for long-term program effects. Such long term impacts are especially relevant for CCI's.
- When programs that are perceived as having an impact on the target community are not sustained, those involved in starting these programs can incur a loss of investment.
- Communities with a history of terminated programs may become disillusioned and reluctant to support new programs in the future.

IV. Assessing sustainability[5]

Assessment criteria for sustainability of the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders[6] comprehensive community initiative include the following:
- A plan and timetable exists for ongoing data collection to assess progress towards goals and to evaluate programs.

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[3] *Analysis…*

[4] *Analysis…*

[5] *Analysis..*

[6] The Comprehensive Strategy provided a research-based framework for combating juvenile crime by targeting prevention efforts on youth who are at risk of delinquent behavior, by intervening early in delinquent behavior, and by responding effectively to youth who have become involved in serious, violent, and chronic offenses. As conceived by planners and funders, the Comprehensive Strategy model included two key phases: planning and implementation. In the planning phase, each community developed a 5 year plan to serve as a blueprint for their juvenile justice planning and implementation activities. The plan was a collaborative process involving multiple actors supported by a formal structure centered on training. The focus of the Comprehensive Strategy was primarily on the planning process – there was little formal structure in the implementation phase.

- Goals are revisited in accordance with on-going evaluation at a specified schedule. Progress towards goals is assessed on a continual basis (benchmarks).
- Organizational structure exists to oversee implementation of recommendations.
- Communication mechanisms between members (stakeholders) for the implementation phase are clearly defined.
- The plan reflects an understanding of potential turnover issues during implementation
- Potential funding sources are discussed and identified.
- Procedures and processes are established to ensure that stakeholders fulfill their responsibilities.
- Proof of collaboration exists or has at least been discussed.

*Most plans within the Comprehsnsive Strategy evaluated based on the above criteria scored poorly, especially in the areas of communication, procedure and processes to ensure fulfillment of responsibilities, collaboration, and dealing with potential turnover. However, a key complication in sustainability is the difficulty in transitioning from the planning to implementation phase of the strategy (initiative).

Some site coordinators involved in the Comprehensive Strategy observed that the strategic plans they developed, while being a critical resource in offering guidance and keeping the initiative moving in the "right direction", were insufficient for implementation. Many sites found that their 5-year plans were either more a summary of the planning process or a "general blueprint". The strategic plans were more of an "outline" of what needed to be accomplished, and lacked the necessary details. Many sites had to spend time reviewing recommendations, further defining each step, and accounting for unanticipated details. Even sites with a well-defined plan discovered that ongoing planning was crucial. All details could not be anticipated and sites had to continually reassess and redefine steps. These findings highlight the importance of beginning with a well-defined plan with an early focus on sustainability that is continued through the implementation phase.

One critical finding from intensive case studies and other components of the evaluation design of the Comprehensive Strategy was the strong disconnect between the planning and implementation phase of the strategy. A number of sites felt that the momentum from the planning stage was not carried through to the implementation phase. This disconnect was driven by a number of factors:

1. Differences in formal collaborative processes between the planning and implementation phases. The collaborative processes in the planning phase were more formal: training sessions, workgroup meetings, and the plans provided a structure for interaction, whereas such opportunities for interaction were far more limited in the implementation phase.
2. Role of the funder in the implementation phase was unclear. The funder's role in the planning phase was more explicit.
3. High turnover of key (staff) persons between the planning and implementation phases.
4. In some communities, pre-existing collaborative councils had been charged with oversight of the implementation and sustainability activities of the Comprehensive Strategy. A number of these collaborative bodies were too busy to monitor implementation activities on an on-going basis.
5. Some sites felt an abrupt disconnect from technical assistance after the planning phase ended.

Funding was a major issue for sites as they transitioned from planning to implementation. Funds were needed to develop the Comprehensive Strategy infrastructure for implementation, sustain and/or expand existing programs, create new programs to fill gaps. A large number of sites felt the need for greater funding, especially during the implementation phase of the strategy and that the absence of funds served to

dissipate the momentum gained during the planning phase. A number of stakeholders provided concrete feedback on funding needs in order to sustain the initiative:

- Guidance on funding sources: Monthly bulletins on funding streams (Federal, State, local level; foundations; grant opportunities, etc.)
- Encourage cross-site learning about funding: Provide ways for sites to learn from each other and to learn what is happening in other communities.

A number of sites found it difficult to keep key people at the table, and to inform and engage new stakeholders. Often, the stakeholders that are required during the implementation phase of an initiative are not the same stakeholders that are beneficial to have at the table during the planning phase. On the other hand, having participants present at the implementation phase who were not present during the planning phase can often slow momentum, especially if the new faces do not understand and/or agree with the recommendations laid out in the plan. In addition, stakeholders often needed to be re-educated about decisions reached and recommendations identified during the planning process in order to ensure that the plan stayed on target.

Many sites struggled with conceptualizing the appropriate infrastructure required for implementation and then with building the capacity to develop the infrastructure.

V. Intermediaries[7],[8]
Intermediaries may have important role in the sustainability of an initiative:
In a growing number of localities over the past 20 years, national and local intermediary organizations have emerged to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information, and resources between city-level institutions and community development corporations. The defining characteristic of a community development intermediary is that it aggregates resources from a variety of sources, packages those resources in useful ways, and distributes them on a one-on-one basis to CDC's. As part of this process, intermediaries often monitor project quality and progress, and may provide technical assistance. For example, intermediaries are the most critical player in moving a community development system to support activities beyond their traditional role (ie. housing). They have been central to all illustrations of systematic efforts to expand the community development system into new activities, and have done so in ways that go well beyond their formal financial roles. Intermediaries broker between City-hall and CDC's; connect and bring in foundations, corporations and banks; consistently take a central role in designing new programs, financial instruments and the like. Intermediaries are also the system's major entrepreneurs in expanding supports for new kinds of community improvement activities, attracting new resources, and spreading "model's" and effective practices.

Foundation-funded intermediaries such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Enterprise Foundation, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing provide funding as well as a variety of technical assistance (mentioned above). A recent study (Backer and Norman 1998) looked at 33 multicultural community coalitions in California and determined that these long standing institutions may also have intermediary roles to play in nonprofit capacity building, especially in communities of color.

VI. Theory of Change and Sustainability[9]

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[7] *Beyond...*

[8] *Building...*

[9] *Using . .*

Creating several theories of change (an organizational theory, a program theory, and a financial theory) that are highly interwoven and mutually dependent, and then integrating these theories into one comprehensive theory of change, can support an organization with a growth strategy, maintain program quality while the growth takes place, and strengthen the organization to help it maintain its long-term sustainability.

VIII. Recommendations (a few):

√ Move away from a model in which program activities occur along a linear sequence of planning , implementation, and sustainability. The sustainability process needs to begin early decisions have been made to adopt or experiment with an innovation.
√ View program implementation and sustainability as concomitant processes, rather than as distinct and successive.
√ Attain a better understanding of the structural differences between the planning processes in the planning and implementation phases. Specifically, given that CCI's are long-term interventions, closer attention needs to be paid to the changes in the network structure of the collaborative over time.

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